



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

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PRESS RELEASE

Western States petition Congress to fix Endangered Species Act

Public land trustees say science—not litigation—should prompt listing of species

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AUSTIN — Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson is leading an effort to unite 23 western states to oppose the federal government's process for adding birds, bugs, lizards and other critters to the list of protected endangered species.

The Western States Land Commissioners Association, whose members manage 447 million acres of public land and mineral rights for public education, passed a resolution urging Congress to fix the Endangered Species Act at its annual winter conference in Austin.

Patterson, former president of the association, drafted the resolution in response to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services efforts to designate the dunes sagebrush lizard as an endangered species despite a lack of data on the lizard's population. Since the lizard's habitat includes millions of acres of public trust mineral rights in West Texas, doing so could potentially cost Texas public schools and universities hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Right now, litigation forces federal biologists to skip over the science and propose listing species simply to settle lawsuits," Patterson said. "This resolution calls on Congress to do whatever it takes to put science first."

Specifically, the resolution focuses on statutory deadlines imposed on the Department of Interior to make 90 day and 12 month findings regarding the suitability for placement of certain species on the federally protected lists.

"Since the Endangered Species Act was adopted in 1973, there have been about 30 species a year proposed for listing," Patterson said. "Starting in 2007, radical environmental activists began to swamp the federal government with around 400 proposed listings a year, overwhelming U.S. Fish and Wildlife's ability to complete the necessary research."

When the overwhelming workload forces the U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists to miss statutory deadlines, environmental groups sue. Federal agencies then enter into

settlements, fast-tracking species as endangered without having ever had the chance to be guided by scientific data.

"Any such designation of a species as threatened or endangered that is not based on sound science will likely have a significant negative economic impact on state trust lands and public lands held by the member states of the (Western States Land Commissioners Association)," the resolution states.

Patterson said the western states association will make every effort to ensure that both Congress and the Department of Interior hear the 23-state organization's voice on this issue.

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